

THE GUARDIAN

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SUBJECT "I'M TIRED"

Two weeks ago, as I was starting my sixth month of duty in Iraq, I was forced to return to the USA for surgery for an injury I sustained prior to my deployment. With luck, I'll return to Iraq to finish my tour.

I left Baghdad and a war that has every indication that we are winning, to return to a demoralized country much like the one I returned to in 1971 after my tour in Vietnam. Maybe it's because I'll turn 60 years old in just four months, but I'm tired.

I'm tired of spineless politicians, both Democrat and Republican who lack the courage, fortitude, and character to see these difficult tasks through.

I'm tired of the hypocrisy of politicians who want to rewrite history when the going gets tough.

I'm tired of the disingenuous clamor from those that claim they 'Support the Troops' by wanting them to 'Cut and Run' before victory is achieved.

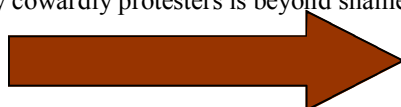
I'm tired of a mainstream media that can only focus on car bombs and casualty reports because they are too afraid to leave the safety of their hotels to report on the courage and success our brave men and women are having on the battlefield.

I'm tired that so many Americans think you can rebuild a dictatorship into a democracy over night.

I'm tired that so many ignore the bravery of the Iraqi people to go to the voting booth and freely elect a Constitution and soon a permanent Parliament.

I'm tired of the so called 'Elite Left' that prolongs this war by giving aid and comfort to our enemy, just as they did during the Vietnam War.

I'm tired of antiwar protesters showing up at the funerals of our fallen soldiers. A family who's loved ones gave their life in a just and noble cause, only to be cruelly tormented on the funeral day by cowardly protesters is beyond shameful.



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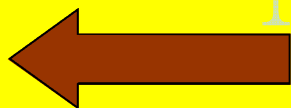
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I left Baghdad and a war that has every indication that we are winning, to return to a demoralized country much like the one I returned to in my tour in Vietnam. Maybe it's because I'll turn 60 years old in just four months, but I'm tired.



News you can use

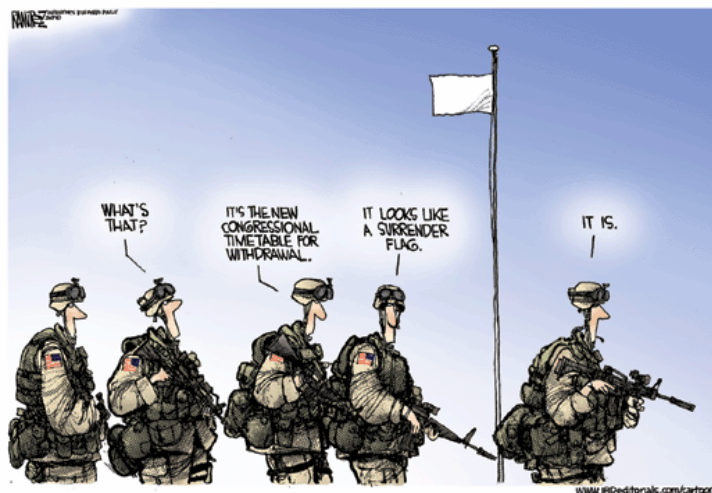
I'm tired that my generation, the Baby Boom -- Vietnam generation, who have such a weak backbone that they can't stomach seeing the difficult tasks through to victory.

I'm tired that some are more concerned about the treatment of captives than they are the slaughter and beheading of our citizens and allies.

I'm tired that when we find mass graves it is seldom reported by the press, but mistreat a prisoner and it is front page news.

Mostly, I'm tired that the people of this great nation didn't learn from history that there is no substitute for Victory.

Sincerely, Joe Repya, Lieutenant Colonel, U. S. Army
101st Airborne Division



The Guardian is published monthly by Dennis Blessing, Service Officer of the Madera County Veterans Service Office. It is freely issued, via email, to all Madera Veterans and Service Organizations.

The primary purpose of this publication is to provide County Veterans with a timely news source; effectively informing veterans of VA up-dates and other pertinent information. Hopefully, it will also serve as an inter-group vehicle, announcing important activities and information offered by other local service organizations.

Your comments and suggestions are always welcomed.

Dennis Blessing, Publisher

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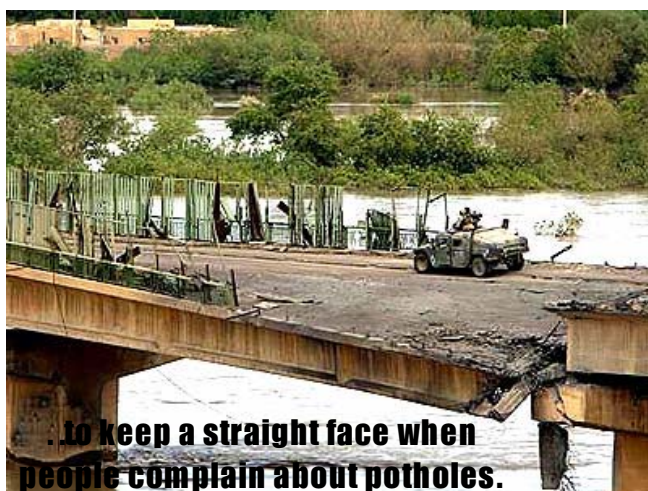
FROM THE FRONT

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
DEFENSE

**War may be hell...
but home ain't exactly heaven, either.**

**When a Soldier comes home from war,
he finds it hard...**

..to listen to his son whine about being bored.



**..to keep a straight face when
people complain about potholes.**



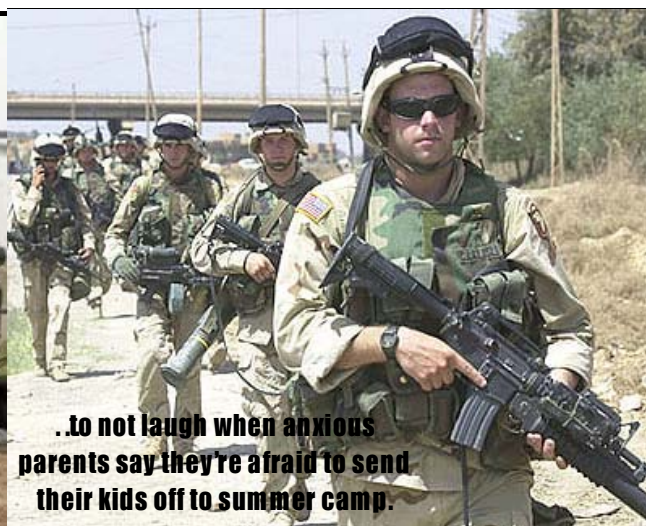
**..to be tolerant of people who complain
about the hassle of getting ready for work**



**..to be understanding when a co-
worker complains about a bad night's
sleep**



**..to control his panic when his wife tells
him he needs to drive slower**





..to remain calm when his daughter complains about having to walk the dog.



..to be civil to people who complain about their jobs.



..to just walk away when someone says they only get two weeks of vacation a year.



..to be happy for a friend's new hot tub



..to be forgiving when someone says how hard it is to have a new baby in the house.



..to not punch a wall when someone says we should pull out immediately.

FROM THE FRONT

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
DEFENSE



**The only thing harder than
being a Soldier...**



is loving one.

**A gentle reminder to
keep your life in perspective.**

**And when you meet one of our
returning Soldiers,
please remember what he's been through
and show him
*compassion and tolerance.***

Thank you.

**CPT Alison L. Crane, RN, MS
Mental Health Nurse Observer-Trainer
7302nd Medical Training Support Battalion**

THE OTHER SIDE !

BUSH QUITTS

We all have our disagreements with President Bush. Immigration, U.S. Attorney firings, Iraq, Darfur, etc. are all hot topics these days. The following "speech" was written yesterday by an ordinary maniac. While satirical in nature, all satire must have a basis in fact to be effective. An excellent piece by a person who does not write for a living. Sent with the author's permission.

The speech George W. Bush SHOULD give:

Normally, I start these things out by saying "My Fellow Americans. "Not doing it this time. If the polls are any indication, I don't know who more than half of you are anymore. I do know something terrible has happened, and that you're really not fellow Americans any longer.

I'll cut right to the chase here: I quit. Now before anyone gets all in a lather about me quitting to avoid impeachment, or to avoid prosecution or something, let me assure you: there's been no breaking of laws or impeachable offenses in this office.

The reason I'm quitting is simple. I'm fed up with you people. I'm fed up because you have no understanding of what's really going on in the world. Or of what's going on in this once-great nation of ours. And the majority of you are too damned lazy to do your homework and figure it out. Let's start local. You've been sold a bill of goods by politicians and the news media. Polls show that the majority of you think the economy is in the tank. And that's despite record numbers of homeowners including record numbers of MINORITY homeowners. And while we're mentioning minorities, I'll point out that minority business ownership is at an all-time high. Our unemployment rate is as low as it ever was during the Clinton Administration. I've mentioned all those things before, but it doesn't seem to have sunk in.

Despite the shock to our economy of 9/11, the stock market has rebounded to record levels and more Americans than ever are participating in these markets. Meanwhile, all you can do is whine about gas prices, and most of you are too damn stupid to realize that gas prices are high because there's increased demand in other parts of the world, and because a small handful of noisy idiots are more worried about polar bears and beachfront property than your economic security.

We face real threats in the world. Don't give me this "blood for oil" thing. If I was trading blood for oil I would've already seized Iraq's oilfields and let the rest of the country go to hell. And don't give me this 'Bush Lied, People Died' crap either. If I was the liar you morons take me for, I could've easily had chemical weapons planted in Iraq so they could be discovered.' Instead, I owned up to the fact that the intelligence was faulty. Let me remind you that the rest of the world thought Saddam had the goods, same as me. Let me also remind you that regime change in Iraq was official US policy before I came into office. Some guy named 'Clinton' established that policy. Bet you didn't know that, did you? You idiots need to understand that we face a unique enemy. Back during the cold war, there were two major competing political and economic models squaring off. We won that war, but we did so because fundamentally, the Communists wanted to survive, just as we do. We were simply able to outspend and out-tech them.

That's not the case this time. The soldiers of our new enemy don't care if they survive. In fact, they want to die. That'd be fine, as long as they weren't also committed to taking as many of you with them as they can. But they are. They want to kill you. And the bastards are all over the globe. You should be grateful that they haven't gotten any more of us here in the United States since September 11. But you're not. That's because you've got no idea how hard a small number of intelligence, military, law enforcement, and homeland security people have worked to make sure of that. When this whole mess started, I warned you that this would be a long and difficult fight. I'm disappointed how many of you people think a long and difficult fight amounts to a single season of 'Survivor'.

Instead, you've grown impatient. You're incapable of seeing things through the long lens of history, the way our enemies do. You think that wars should last a few months, a few years, tops.

Making matters worse, you actively support those who help the enemy. Every time you buy the New York Times, every time you send a donation to a cut-and-run Democrat's political campaign, well, damn it, you might just as well FedEx a grenade launcher to a Jihadist. It amounts to the same thing. In this day and age, it's easy enough to find the truth. It's all over the Internet. It just isn't on the pages of the New York Times or on NBC News. But even if it were, I doubt you'd be any smarter. Most of you would rather watch American Idol.

I could say more about your expectations that the government will always be there to bail you out, even if you're too stupid to leave a city that's below sea level and has a hurricane approaching. I could say more about your insane belief that government, not your own wallet, is where the money comes from. But I've come to the conclusion that were I to do so, it would sail right over your heads.

So I quit. I'm going back to Crawford. I've got an energy-efficient house down there (Al Gore could only dream) and the capability to be fully self-sufficient. No one ever heard of Crawford before I got elected, and as soon as I'm done here pretty much no one will ever hear of it again. Maybe I'll be lucky enough to die of old age before the last pillars of America fall. Oh, and by the way, Cheney's quitting too. That means Pelosi is your new President. You asked for it. Watch what she does carefully, because I have a glimmer of hope that there're just enough of you remaining who are smart enough to turn this thing around in 2008.

That's it. God bless what's left of America. Some of you know what I mean. The rest of you, * off.

Once Upon America

By John Cory
t r u t h o u t | Guest Contributor

Wednesday 04 July 2007

"No one man can terrorize a whole nation unless we are all his accomplices."
- Edward R. Murrow

And so it goes. The 4th of July is here with its parades and "what America means to me" essays, and picnics and fireworks, and all those pretty speeches about freedom and democracy and the true meaning of Independence Day. But it is all a facade. A lie.

Modern America now spies on its citizens, conducts warrantless wiretaps, suspends habeas corpus, creates "free speech zones" to corral protestors out of sight of sensitive royal eyes, and politicizes the very justice system meant to protect people's rights by turning it into a fraternity of God-fearing Republican conservatism. Neocon America rewards hate speech with celebrity, reviles the very immigration that built this country, and sells out to the highest lobbyist while poisoning its people. Preemptive war trumps truth, and death is glorified by those who never have to sacrifice an ounce of flesh. America has become the personal ATM machine of Bush and the GOP while their corporate cronies line their pockets with the lives of our loved ones.

Washington is no longer that "shining city on the hill," but rather a dismal swamp cloud of shadows that slink about in swirls of deception. The people's house is a piceous cavern of razor black secrets that shred the Constitution with every breath. And those charged with defending the Constitution - defending the Bill of Rights - scurry around in frantic search for the cheese of compromise and campaign contributions.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

Americans have become orphans of the great silence.

Democrat and Republican alike have forsaken representation of the people and the people's will. The latest polls show that 77 percent of Americans want the troops home from Iraq. And still the politicians argue for more time, maybe more money, maybe there is a way to support the troops without confronting the GOP machine. Congressional approval is at the

same depressing nadir as that of George Bush. The people voted for change and got nothing but wimpy words and bluster and more political petulance - and more death and destruction.

America needs leadership, not Congressional co-conspirators or senatorial somnambulists. We need inspiration, not desperation. Edward R. Murrow said: "We hardly need to be reminded that we are living in an age of confusion - a lot of us have traded in our beliefs for bitterness and cynicism or for a heavy package of despair, or even a quivering portion of hysteria. Opinions can be picked up cheap in the market place while such commodities as courage and fortitude and faith are in alarmingly short supply."

I'm not a smart guy, nor educated in the fine political arts, but here's the deal: it's time to wake up and step up, dear Democrats. Plan all you want to take Congressional seats in the '08 elections - but be prepared to pay the price for inaction today. Nothing is off the table. Nothing. Ever.

Push the subpoenas to this White House. Don't fold. Don't whine. Don't run. And while you push the subpoenas to find the truth, fashion your spending bill that America supports, the one with the timetable for bringing our loved ones home. And then push that the day after you push the subpoenas. And when Bush vetoes the spending bill, shout it from the nearest blog and rooftop, that George Bush just vetoed America. Vetoed the will of the American people. And push for another vote.

And then generate the bill to bring back the Draft. That's right, the Draft. If Bush's war is so damned patriotic that he keeps recycling the troops over and over - then it is the patriotic duty of every American son and daughter to be drafted and serve. And when Bush vetoes that, remind America that the war is not all that patriotic, and certainly not for everyone - just those that Bush picks to die in the sandbox of incompetence and violence that is Iraq.

And then you start impeachment procedures against Bush and Cheney and Rove. You push the hearings that must be shown to all the American people - the voters - the ones who live and die at the hands of these ruthless, greedy thugs and power-hungry politicians.

And when you are called un-American and unpatriotic, point your finger at Bush and Cheney and remind everyone of Ronald Reagan, who said: "Concentrated power has always been the enemy of liberty." And that, my Democratic friends, is all the bipartisanship this country needs. The words of Dr. King should be your comfort. "When you are right you cannot be too radical; when you are wrong, you cannot be too conservative."

It is the 4th of July. Celebrate Independence Day by repeating the words of George Bush when he addressed the UN Assembly on September 21, 2004. "The desire for freedom resides in every human heart. And that desire cannot be contained forever by prison walls or martial laws, or secret police. Over time, and across the Earth, freedom will find a way."

Any other choice and we become a story that begins, "Once upon America there used to be democracy and freedom"

John Cory is a Vietnam veteran. He received the Purple Heart and Bronze Star with V device, 1969 - 1970.

Reservist Fighting His Fifth War Call-Up

**By Amy Driscoll
The Miami Herald**

Sunday 08 July 2007

After serving in Afghanistan and three times in Iraq, an Army Reserve sergeant from Port St. Lucie recoiled at still another deployment.

Erik Botta believes he's done right by his country.

Days after 9/11, as a young Army reservist, he volunteered to go to war. He was soon in Afghanistan.

The next year, he was sent out again, this time to Iraq, part of a Special Operations team.

In the next two years, he was sent to Iraq again. And again.

He thought he was done. But now, the Army wants Sgt. Botta one more time.

The 26-year-old Port St. Lucie man has been ordered to report to Fort Jackson, S.C., on July 15 for his fifth deployment. And that has compelled Botta, a first-generation American who counts himself a quiet patriot, to do something he never thought he'd do: sue the Army.

"I'm proud of my service," he said. "I never wanted it to end like this."

Nearly seven years into his eight-year commitment to the reserves, the personal costs are higher for Botta. He could lose his home. His job at Sikorsky, working on the Black Hawk military helicopter, could be on the line. He's halfway to his electrical engineering degree, planning a career in defense work, but his professors say he'll suffer a significant setback if he is deployed. He doesn't mention the danger another deployment would bring, but his wife and parents do.

"I'm proud of being in the Army," he said. "They taught me responsibility. They taught me maturity. And they gave me a good toolbox of technical skills to work with. I think I'd be more valuable to my country at this point by being here, getting my degree and working at Sikorsky."

In a lawsuit he expects to file this week in federal court in Florida, Botta says he will ask for an exemption or delay so that he can complete his engineering studies. He will also ask the court to prevent the Army from requiring him to report for duty until the legal questions are settled.

His attorney, Mark Waple - a West Point graduate and former military judge advocate who practices in Fayetteville, N.C. - says Botta's case shows that the Army is inconsistent in its decisions when selecting reservists for involuntary mobilization, over and over.

"This is an arbitrary decision by the Army Human Resources Command with no rational basis," Waple said.

The Consequences

Deployment now would mean that he could no longer afford his house - his wife would probably have to move in with her parents. Plans to start a family would be on hold. He would probably have to repeat some engineering courses after his return, and he might even lose the job he just landed about a month ago. Previously, he worked at Pratt & Whitney in the Joint Strike Fighter and Raptor engine programs.

"This is no peace protester," Waple said. "I wouldn't have touched this case with a 10-foot pole if it was. He's put the boots on and been in combat."

Although Botta knew there was a risk that he would be called to duty again, he assumed that it was very slight, given his four combat deployments, pursuit of an engineering degree and employment with military contractors, he said.

"The world pretty much stopped when I got the notice," said Botta, weighing each word. "I've sacrificed a lot for the military. I didn't want to end with litigation, but I feel I've done my service to my country. I've done what I signed up for in more ways than one."

The Army doesn't agree. It turned down one appeal, with another pending but unofficially denied. Last year, it granted Botta a 287-day delay, pushing his deployment date to this month, after an inquiry by U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla.

"This is something we're starting to see more of," Bryan Gulley, Nelson's spokesman, said about repeat deployments. "It's one of the reasons Nelson has been saying we have to stop relying so heavily on the [National] Guard and the Reserve."

Army spokeswoman Maj. Cheryl Phillips issued a statement Friday regarding Botta's case, saying in part that the Army evaluates "each request independently to determine if the mobilization will cause undue hardship for the soldier or the family. We appreciate the sacrifice our citizen soldiers and their families make when called to active duty."

The Army has granted 87 percent of delays requested by soldiers - most are 90 days or less - and 54 percent of exemptions, the statement said. It did not comment on Botta's case, but the Army said in a letter sent to him regarding one of his

appeals that he did not "meet the requirements for a hardship exemption/discharge."

Botta joined the reserves in 2000 and asked to be activated in 2001 - "I felt like I had to do something" after 9/11, he said - and his tours of duty have lasted up to eight months. He left active duty at the end of 2004.

Under his current reporting date, he might not even complete the semester; classes end in August.

Attorney Waple says the Army has granted an exemption in at least one similar case, in 2005. A 24-year-old North Carolina enlisted Army reservist with two combat tours under his belt - in Iraq and Kosovo - was involuntarily mobilized while attending community college in Raleigh, pursuing a degree in chemical engineering.

He had completed five of his eight years in the service, Waple said. The man's first appeal was denied, but after Waple filed a second appeal, he was given an exemption and honorably discharged, Waple said.

Botta's case may be even stronger. He has completed more years of service and more combat tours, has a job in the defense industry while pursuing his engineering degree, and was granted a 287-day delay already, Waple noted.

Botta has tried hard to avoid a suit, Waple said, filing every appeal available within the Army's justice system. Botta and his wife have sent letters to everyone from Sen. Nelson to the White House. His professors and employers have sent letters, too, on his behalf.

"It's an awkward thing for any serviceman," Waple said. "He has a very strong sense of responsibility and duty to serve."

In his own letters to the Army, Botta notes that he is attending school on the GI Bill, maintaining a 3.9 grade-point average, and is grateful that he can use his Army skills in his work with military contractors.

"If I was to go back to the Army at this juncture in my life, I could very well lose my house and be in considerable debt for years to come," Botta wrote. "I am proud of the fact that I can still continue to serve my country with the knowledge that I have acquired from the U.S. Army."

The Army's response during the appeals, Botta said, has been "minimal communication."

Carlos Botta, his father, a naturalized U.S. citizen from Argentina, said he applauded his son's military service - until now. "He served in Afghanistan. He served three times in Iraq. The odds are getting slimmer and slimmer for him. He might get hurt. Don't you think he has served the country enough already?"

Wife's Concerns

Botta's wife, Jennifer, who married him between Iraq stints, said she can't face the idea of his returning to combat. Losing their house, painful as that would be, is the least of her worries.

"He's been over there four times. There's only so many times you can go over without something happening...." Her voice trailed off.

During his deployments, she said, she would watch television news reports about bombings and then count the hours until he called. "My cellphone was in my hand 24 hours a day," she said. "I never let it go."

For Erik Botta, who keeps his hair military-short, the last few months have played out as a struggle between his battle-hardened loyalty to the Army and an abiding sense of what's right.

"We were in a wartime situation," he said. "I did what they asked me to do. I went over and did it. And then when I was leaving, they told me I could leave. They told me to get on with my life, and I did. Now it seems they've changed their mind."

But he doesn't regret his service - at all. "I'm proud to be in the Army, and I'm proud - cheesy as it might sound - I'm proud to be an American."

Troubled Soldier Gets Demoted, Not Treated

**By Aaron Glantz
Inter Press Service**

Friday 06 July 2007

San Francisco - Cody Miranda joined the U.S. Marine Corps when he was 17 years old. He loved the military and hoped to spend his entire career in the service.

Miranda has served more than 16 years in the Marine Corps. Over the years, he's been deployed to the Middle East six times, including stints in the 1991 Persian Gulf War and the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

But when he returned from a tour in Iraq in 2003, his stepmother Jodie Stewart says, he was a changed man.

"He always used to be over focused on time as the military trains you to be," she said as an example. "He's never on time for anything anymore. I don't know how to explain it to you. How do you explain it when a man who used to behave one way has gone abstractly and profoundly different?"

After returning from Iraq, Cody Miranda divorced his wife and pulled away from his son. He started drinking too much and was found in possession of cocaine.

"He never received any of the post-deployment questionnaires that now are mandatory for all troops," said Amanda Newman, a licensed family therapist who's been seeing Miranda on a pro-bono basis for the past few weeks. "He couldn't understand why all of a sudden his life was falling apart."

In 2005, Miranda went Absent Without Leave from Camp Pendleton in California for nearly a year and lived homeless on the street.

When he returned to the Marine Corps, military doctors diagnosed him with severe post-traumatic stress disorder; an anxiety illness that can develop after exposure to a terrifying event or ordeal in which grave physical harm occurred or was threatened, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. A person having a flashback may lose touch with reality and believe that the traumatic incident is happening all over again.

Military doctors also diagnosed Miranda with bipolar disorder, insomnia and sleep apnea.

But rather than give him treatment for his illness, the Marine Corps lowered his rank to private from staff sergeant, threw him in the brig multiple times (most recently for being five minutes late for a hearing), and began court martial proceedings that can lead to a dishonourable discharge - which would have denied the medical benefits Miranda needs to get his life right again.

Newman said Miranda needs inpatient psychiatric care, which he is not receiving, and complained that her attempts to see him while in the brig were delayed as a result of military orders.

"I asked immediately to see him in the brig and was told that it was not possible," Newman wrote to Miranda's military lawyer on Jun.29. "This is absolutely unacceptable: if a Marine was experiencing a medical emergency and had cut an artery and was bleeding profusely, he surely would not be denied treatment simply because he was in the brig."

"In fact I would assume and hope that he would be transferred to the hospital for appropriate treatment. There is no difference regarding the severity and crisis nature of Pvt Miranda's psychiatric condition and that of a medical condition: both are life threatening," she wrote.

Officials at Camp Pendleton did not respond to multiple telephone and e-mail inquiries by deadline. Thirty-six hours after receiving a written request for information, a public affairs representative of the base told IPS: "I still don't have anything for you."

But public attention did appear to have an effect, however.

On Tuesday, after veterans' groups helped Miranda file formal complaints with California Congressman Ken Calvert and Senator Barbara Boxer, Camp Pendleton's commander, Col. James B. Seaton, abandoned plans for a court martial.

According to military defence lawyer Captain Bart Slabbekorn, Miranda was brought before the base commander Jul. 3 and given "non-judicial punishment."

"As a result of today's proceedings, Pvt Miranda may be retained in the Marine Corps or he may ultimately leave active duty," Slabbekorn wrote in a letter to supporters. "Either way, at this point, he will be looking at a discharge making him eligible for VA (Veterans Affairs) treatment down the road."

If Miranda does remain in the military, it's likely he will be assigned to the Wounded Warrior Battalion, where he would work with other soldiers facing similar issues.

"The future is up to Miranda," Slabbekorn said.

But Cody Miranda is not alone.

The Department of Defence's most recent mental health survey found about 20 percent of soldiers met screening criteria for a mental health problem and that there was a "linear relationship" between combat exposure and subsequent mental health problems. Nearly one-third of troops who had seen "high combat" met criteria for a mental health problem.

Slabbekorn told San Diego's KSUI television between 10 to 20 percent of soldiers imprisoned in Camp Pendleton's brig suffer from some kind of combat-related mental illness.

In the first four years of the Iraq war, 1,019 Marines were dismissed with less-than-honourable discharges for misconduct committed after overseas deployments. Navy Capt. William Nash, who coordinates the Marines' combat stress programme, told USA Today this week that at least 326 of the discharged Marines showed evidence of mental health problems, possibly from combat stress, according to the Marines story.

Nash told the paper he hoped that "any Marine or sailor who commits particularly uncharacteristic misconduct following deployment ... be aggressively screened for stress disorders and treated."

"If a Marine who was previously a good, solid Marine - never got in trouble - commits misconduct after deployment and turns out they have PTSD, and because of justice they lose their benefits, that may not be justice," Nash said.

The Marine Corps has yet to follow up on Nash's recommendations.

"Supporting the Troops" Means Withdrawing Them"

**By William E. Odom
Nieman Watchdog**

Thursday 05 July 2007

General William Odom writes that opponents of the war should focus public attention on the fact that Bush's obstinate refusal to admit defeat is causing the troops enormous psychological as well as physical harm.

Every step the Democrats in Congress have taken to force the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq has failed. Time and again, President Bush beats them into submission with charges of failing to "support the troops."

Why do the Democrats allow this to happen? Because they let the president define what "supporting the troops" means. His definition is brutally misleading. Consider what his policies are doing to the troops.

No U.S. forces have ever been compelled to stay in sustained combat conditions for as long as the Army units have in Iraq. In World War II, soldiers were considered combat-exhausted after about 180 days in the line. They were withdrawn for rest periods. Moreover, for weeks at a time, large sectors of the front were quiet, giving them time for both physical and psychological rehabilitation. During some periods of the Korean War, units had to fight steadily for fairly long periods but not for a year at a time. In Vietnam, tours were one year in length, and combat was intermittent with significant break periods.

In Iraq, combat units take over an area of operations and patrol it daily, making soldiers face the prospect of death from an IED or small arms fire or mortar fire several hours each day. Day in and day out for a full year, with only a single two-week break, they confront the prospect of death, losing limbs or eyes, or suffering other serious wounds. Although total losses in Iraq have been relatively small compared to most previous conflicts, the individual soldier is risking death or serious injury day after day for a year. The impact on the psyche accumulates, eventually producing what is now called "post-traumatic stress disorders." In other words, they are combat-exhausted to the point of losing effectiveness. The occasional willful killing of civilians in a few cases is probably indicative of such loss of effectiveness. These incidents don't seem to occur during the first half of a unit's deployment in Iraq.

After the first year, following a few months back home, these same soldiers are sent back for a second year, then a third year, and now, many are facing a fourth deployment! Little wonder more and more soldiers and veterans are psychologically disabled.

And the damage is not just to enlisted soldiers. Many officers are suffering serious post-traumatic stress disorders but are hesitant to report it - with good reason. An officer who needs psychiatric care and lets it appear on his medical records has most probably ended his career. He will be considered not sufficiently stable to lead troops. Thus officers are strongly inclined to avoid treatment and to hide their problems.

There are only two ways to fix this problem, both of which the president stubbornly rejects. Instead, his recent "surge" tactic has compelled the secretary of defense to extend Army tours to 15 months! (The Marines have been allowed to retain their six-month deployment policy and, not surprisingly, have fewer cases of post-traumatic stress syndrome.)

The first solution would be to expand the size of the Army to two or three times its present level, allowing shorter combat tours and much longer breaks between deployments. That cannot be done rapidly enough today, even if military conscription were restored and new recruits made abundant. It would take more than a year to organize and train a dozen new brigade combat teams. The Clinton administration cut the Army end strength by about 40 percent - from about 770,000 to 470,000 during the 1990s. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld looked for ways to make the cuts even deeper. Thus this administration and its predecessor aggressively gave up ground forces and tactical air forces while maintaining large maritime forces that cannot be used in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Sadly, the lack of wisdom in that change in force structure is being paid for not by President Bush or President Clinton but by the ordinary soldier and his family. They have no lobby group to seek relief for them.

The second way to alleviate the problem is to withdraw U.S. forces from Iraq as soon as possible and as securely as possible. The electorate understands this. That is why a majority of voters favor withdrawing from Iraq.

If the Democrats truly want to succeed in forcing President Bush to begin withdrawing from Iraq, the first step is to redefine "supporting the troops" as withdrawing them, citing the mass of accumulating evidence of the psychological as well as the physical damage that the president is forcing them to endure because he did not raise adequate forces. Both Democrats and Republicans in Congress could confirm this evidence and lay the blame for "not supporting the troops" where it really belongs - on the president. And they could rightly claim to the public that they are supporting the troops by cutting off the funds that he uses to keep U.S. forces in Iraq.

The public is ahead of the both branches of government in grasping this reality, but political leaders and opinion makers in the media must give them greater voice.

Congress clearly and indisputably has two powers over the executive: the power of the purse and the power to impeach. Instead of using either, members of congress are wasting their time discussing feckless measures like a bill that "de-authorizes the war in Iraq." That is toothless unless it is matched by a cut-off of funds.

The president is strongly motivated to string out the war until he leaves office, in order to avoid taking responsibility for the defeat he has caused and persisted in making greater each year for more than three years.

To force him to begin a withdrawal before then, the first step should be to rally the public by providing an honest and candid definition of what "supporting the troops" really means and pointing out who is and who is not supporting our troops at war. The next step should be a flat refusal to appropriate money for to be used in Iraq for anything but withdrawal operations with a clear deadline for completion.

The final step should be to put that president on notice that if ignores this legislative action and tries to extort Congress into providing funds by keeping U.S. forces in peril, impeachment proceeding will proceed in the House of Representatives. Such presidential behavior surely would constitute the "high crime" of squandering the lives of soldiers and Marines for his own personal interest.

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Bush's Real Fourth of July Message to Nation: Unprintable

By Elizabeth de la Vega

t r u t h o u t | Guest Contributor

Friday 06 July 2007

Knowing I could not listen to President Bush's actual voice on what is supposed to be a fun holiday, I turned to the White House web site to find his Fourth of July greeting. We continue to be, the president assures us, steadfastly committed to "America's founding truths" - including, of course, liberty and equality. I think it was the word "equality" that caused me to start choking on my corn on the cob.

Maybe there was some mistake. This web site posting did not even come close to reflecting the president's real Fourth of July message to the nation. That had been quite effectively delivered earlier in the week when Bush announced he was commuting I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby's sentence from thirty months to zero months. Apparently confusing his duties as president of the United States with those of a behind-the-plate umpire, President Bush called Libby's sentence "excessive" and threw the prison time out, as casually as if he were calling balls and strikes in a game of sandlot baseball. In so doing, President Bush sent a message to the American people that is as unambiguous as it is unprintable. Expressed verbally, the real message Bush was sending to the people of the United States could have been sent with just two words (the second of which is "you"); expressed physically, Bush's underlying message could have been conveyed with just one finger.

Either way, President Bush has again made it as clear as a Wisconsin lake that he has nothing but contempt for equality and the "rule 'a law" he is so fond of championing. Yes, a president has the constitutional power of clemency. He may pardon a criminal defendant, thereby wiping out the entire conviction and its consequences, or commute the sentence, thereby lessening it to some degree or entirely. But even this power, broad as it is, can be abused and, in the case of United States v. Libby, President Bush has done just that.

Just how egregious was the president's unapologetic and cavalier act of favoritism for a wealthy and powerful friend? To ask the question is to answer it, but to fully appreciate the extent of corruption inherent in the president's recent shameless exercise of noblesse sans oblige, one needs to know a bit about Bush and the Federal Sentencing Guidelines.

In the spirit of full disclosure, let me say that I, along with many others who have worked in the federal criminal justice system, have never been a fan of the sentencing guidelines. Formulated by a commission that was, in turn, created by the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984, the guidelines were specifically intended to promote fairness and remove unwarranted sentencing disparities. In practice, however, particularly in drug cases, application of the guidelines has led to draconian sentences - an inequity that federal judges, prosecutors and defense attorneys have attempted to address by applying various factors that could justify a downward departure from the prescribed range.

But, up until July 2, 2007, when he decided to take the law into his own hands, President Bush loved the sentencing guidelines. Bush and the Republicans have, for years, been insisting that the guidelines be applied rigidly - the president was simply not going to have any of this unseemly leniency that was beginning to infect the federal system under his watch. Indeed, in 2003, during the very same period that Bush, Cheney, Libby and the gang were scrambling to squelch the ever-increasing revelations about the president's fraudulent case for war, Bush's Justice Department, then under the leadership of John Ashcroft - and a posse of conservative Republican members of Congress - decided to take on these wimpy judges and make sure that neither they, nor any equally wimpy prosecutors, could exercise any discretion whatsoever with regard to sentencing. Tom DeLay told judges, "We are watching you" and the Bush administration tacked onto a child pornography law an amendment that required every downward departure from the guidelines to be reported to Congress.

Not surprisingly, this amendment, called the Feeney Amendment in honor of its titular sponsor, Representative Tom Feeney (R-Florida), caused a huge uproar, but its spirit lives on in the Department of Justice today. Right now, in July of 2007, prosecutors are required to oppose virtually all downward departures from the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, except those based on substantial assistance to the government. If a judge does grant a downward departure that was not sought by the government, the prosecutor has to report that to DoJ's appellate division for consideration of an appeal.

What does this mean in the context of the Libby case? With due consideration to the high likelihood that some of the people reading this may have had an extra beer or two the day before, I am going to make it very simple:

Scooter Libby was sentenced in accordance with the sentencing guidelines, to which President Bush has been insisting that prosecutors and judges slavishly adhere ever since he arrived in the White House. The sentencing range required by case law that Bush's own DoJ attorneys have routinely argued for, in cases throughout the country, was 30 to 37 months. Judge Reggie Walton gave Libby the lowest sentence within that range. Legally, the only way the judge could impose a sentence less than 30 months would have been if he had granted Libby's motion for downward departure. Libby had not provided substantial assistance to the government. Therefore, under the rules currently in effect within Bush's Justice Department, Libby had no legitimate ground for downward departure, and Patrick Fitzgerald was required to oppose his motion. If Judge Walton had actually departed downward based on any of these unapproved grounds, Fitzgerald would have been required, per the United States Attorneys' Manual, to report the downward departure so that issue could be evaluated for appeal.

So, forgive me if I started choking on my blueberry cobbler when I read Tony Snow's July 3 statement to reporters: "The President spent weeks and weeks consulting with senior members of this White House about the proper way to proceed, and they looked at a whole lot of options, and they spent a lot of time talking through the options and doing some very detailed legal analysis." Bush, we know, never spoke to any of the legal experts on the case, including, most notably, the prosecutor - even though Department of Justice clemency procedures call for such a consultation. He may well have spent "weeks and weeks" consulting with Dick Cheney and Karl Rove and their ilk in order to decide how to handle "the Libby issue," but they were only talking about how to sell an act of clemency ... what their talking points would be. Bush's statement betrays not a shred of legal analysis, which is not surprising, since there is none available to justify his decision.

The bottom line is that Bush's commitment to equality, the rule of law and uniform sentencing under the federal guidelines fizzled like a Fourth of July sparkler when it came to his friend.

Even more important, Bush, of course, never intended to allow Libby to go to prison at all. Indeed, his original plan was to avoid any investigation whatsoever into the unauthorized disclosure of Valerie Wilson's identity as a CIA agent. The president could have, and should have, begun an internal investigation when Robert Novak's column exposed the existence of the leak on July 14, 2003. He didn't; he waited. Once the investigation was announced in late September 2003, Bush was still constitutionally required to ferret out the miscreants in his shop, but he did not do so. Instead, he professed cooperation with the investigation in one breath, but undermined it in the next, commenting famously that he didn't think the leakers would ever be found. And then, most cynically, Bush used the criminal proceedings as a shield to avoid questions about the

White House's conduct, a technique that served him well through two national election cycles.

The president of the United States watched and waited as an entire team of federal prosecutors, investigators and support personnel spent years and millions in taxpayers' dollars on an entirely justified and legitimate grand-jury investigation into whether members of that president's own White House had violated the laws of the United States. He watched and waited, hoping there would be no charges, as two grand juries (a total of about 40 US citizens) spent months of their valuable time listening to the evidence.

President Bush watched and waited, hoping the case would be dismissed, as millions of additional federal dollars and limited US District Court resources were expended on extensive pretrial litigation.

Hoping next - probably by this time praying - that Libby would be acquitted, the president watched and waited during a six-week trial that consumed additional court time and took twelve additional US citizens away from their daily lives. He watched and waited for the lengthy sentencing process to play out, and then, once the sentence had been imposed, he allowed additional federal resources - including the valuable time of three Court of Appeals judges - to be expended on Libby's motion for release on bond pending appeal.

In other words, well-knowing, despite his repeated assurances to the contrary, that he would never respect any adverse outcome of the criminal case against his and Vice President Cheney's top adviser and friend, the president simply and cravenly waited to reveal his true intentions to the American people until he could wait no longer, all the while hiding behind that very same criminal case.

This extended course of deception does not end the story: The statement Bush made when he emerged briefly from his Kennebunkport estate to issue a reprieve for the wealthy and powerful criminal defendant who happened to be his friend, was, of itself, a multilayered fraud. In his July 2 message, Bush, suddenly Solomon-like, attempted to convince the public that the matter he had been avoiding for four years on the ground that it was a pending legal case is, in fact, nothing more than a political dispute to be resolved through compromise. Clemency, Bush would now have us believe, is a decision to be made by weighing the arguments of "critics" and "supporters" of the investigation as if a pending criminal case could be decided by referendum, or maybe a call-in vote, the way we choose the American Idol. Working from this deliberately false premise, the president then purports to "weigh," as if they were equivalent, the arguments of Libby's defense team, which had already been rejected by Judge Walton and found insubstantial by the DC Circuit Court of Appeals, against the actual facts and law of the case.

Bush's decision to commute Libby's sentence was not a compromise between the positions of critics and supporters of the case. The president was not settling a dispute between those who wanted the sentence to stand and those who wanted a pardon. He was simply doing what he intended to do all along - keeping Libby out of jail. The only reason Bush did not pardon Libby was because he wanted Libby to be able to continue to plead his fifth amendment privilege not to testify against himself - most particularly before Congress - based on the fact that the case was still before the Court of Appeals.

From the beginning, with regard to the CIA leak investigation, the president has deceived the American people and abused his power in a manner and to a degree that would be awe-inspiring if it were not so disgraceful. His conduct has been a study in perfidy and disregard for the law - the willful betrayal of the confidence and trust of the American people. These are the very definition of impeachable offenses. It is not enough for Congress to ask the public to send petitions and call the White House to "send a message" that the president's conduct will not be tolerated. It is up to Congress to deliver that message, and they know exactly what they have to do.

Elizabeth de la Vega is a former federal prosecutor with more than 20 years of experience. During her tenure, she was a member of the Organized Crime Strike Force and chief of the San Jose Branch of the US Attorney's Office for the Northern District of California. Her pieces have appeared in The Nation, the Los Angeles Times and Salon. She writes regularly for Tomdispatch.com. She is the author of "United States v. George W. Bush et al." which has been optioned for a movie now in preproduction. (www.USvBushmovie.com). She may be contacted at ElizabethdeVega@Verizon.net.

Much of US Favors Bush Impeachment: Poll

Agence France-Presse

Saturday 07 July 2007

Washington - Nearly half of the US public wants President George W. Bush to face impeachment, and even more favor that fate for Vice President Dick Cheney, according to a poll out Friday.

The survey by the American Research Group found that 45 percent support the US House of Representatives beginning impeachment proceedings against Bush, with 46 percent opposed, and a 54-40 split in favor when it comes to Cheney.

The study by the private New Hampshire-based ARG canvassed 1,100 Americans by telephone July 3-5 and had an error margin of plus or minus three percentage points. The findings are available on ARG's Internet site.

The White House declined to comment on the poll, the latest bad news for a president who has seen his public opinion standings dragged to record lows by the unpopular war in Iraq.

The US Constitution says presidents and vice presidents can be impeached - that is, formally charged by the House - for "treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors" by a simple majority vote.

Conviction by the Senate, which requires a two-thirds majority, means removal from office.

Just two US presidents have been impeached: Bill Clinton was impeached in 1998 and acquitted in 1999; Andrew Johnson was impeached and acquitted in 1868. Disgraced president Richard Nixon resigned in 1974 when a House impeachment vote appeared likely.

In late April, left-wing Representative Dennis Kucinich, a long-shot Democratic presidential hopeful, introduced a resolution calling for Cheney's impeachment. To date, the measure has nine listed co-sponsors and a 10th set to sign on when the House returns to work next week.

But Democratic leaders appear unlikely to pursue such a course.

The Road Home

The New York Times | Editorial

Sunday 08 July 2007

It is time for the United States to leave Iraq, without any more delay than the Pentagon needs to organize an orderly exit.

Like many Americans, we have put off that conclusion, waiting for a sign that President Bush was seriously trying to dig the United States out of the disaster he created by invading Iraq without sufficient cause, in the face of global opposition, and without a plan to stabilize the country afterward.

At first, we believed that after destroying Iraq's government, army, police and economic structures, the United States was obliged to try to accomplish some of the goals Mr. Bush claimed to be pursuing, chiefly building a stable, unified Iraq. When it became clear that the president had neither the vision nor the means to do that, we argued against setting a withdrawal date while there was still some chance to mitigate the chaos that would most likely follow.

While Mr. Bush scorns deadlines, he kept promising breakthroughs - after elections, after a constitution, after sending in thousands more troops. But those milestones came and went without any progress toward a stable, democratic Iraq or a path for withdrawal. It is frighteningly clear that Mr. Bush's plan is to stay the course as long as he is president and dump the mess on his successor. Whatever his cause was, it is lost.

The political leaders Washington has backed are incapable of putting national interests ahead of sectarian score settling. The security forces Washington has trained behave more like partisan militias. Additional military forces poured into the Baghdad region have failed to change anything.

Continuing to sacrifice the lives and limbs of American soldiers is wrong. The war is sapping the strength of the nation's alliances and its military forces. It is a dangerous diversion from the life-and-death struggle against terrorists. It is an increasing burden on American taxpayers, and it is a betrayal of a world that needs the wise application of American power and principles.

A majority of Americans reached these conclusions months ago. Even in politically polarized Washington, positions on the war no longer divide entirely on party lines. When Congress returns this week, extricating American troops from the war should be at the top of its agenda.

That conversation must be candid and focused. Americans must be clear that Iraq, and the region around it, could be even bloodier and more chaotic after Americans leave. There could be reprisals against those who worked with American forces, further ethnic cleansing, even genocide. Potentially destabilizing refugee flows could hit Jordan and Syria. Iran and Turkey could be tempted to make power grabs. Perhaps most important, the invasion has created a new stronghold from which terrorist activity could proliferate.

The administration, the Democratic-controlled Congress, the United Nations and America's allies must try to mitigate those outcomes - and they may fail. But Americans must be equally honest about the fact that keeping troops in Iraq will only make things worse. The nation needs a serious discussion, now, about how to accomplish a withdrawal and meet some of the big challenges that will arise.

The Mechanics of Withdrawal

The United States has about 160,000 troops and millions of tons of military gear inside Iraq. Getting that force out safely will be a formidable challenge. The main road south to Kuwait is notoriously vulnerable to roadside bomb attacks. Soldiers, weapons and vehicles will need to be deployed to secure bases while airlift and sealift operations are organized. Withdrawal routes will have to be guarded. The exit must be everything the invasion was not: based on reality and backed by adequate resources.

The United States should explore using Kurdish territory in the north of Iraq as a secure staging area. Being able to use bases and ports in Turkey would also make withdrawal faster and safer. Turkey has been an inconsistent ally in this war, but like other nations, it should realize that shouldering part of the burden of the aftermath is in its own interest.

Accomplishing all of this in less than six months is probably unrealistic. The political decision should be made, and the target date set, now.

The Fight Against Terrorists

Despite President Bush's repeated claims, Al Qaeda had no significant foothold in Iraq before the invasion, which gave it new base camps, new recruits and new prestige.

This war diverted Pentagon resources from Afghanistan, where the military had a real chance to hunt down Al Qaeda's leaders. It alienated essential allies in the war against terrorism. It drained the strength and readiness of American troops.

And it created a new front where the United States will have to continue to battle terrorist forces and enlist local allies who reject the idea of an Iraq hijacked by international terrorists. The military will need resources and bases to stanch this self-inflicted wound for the foreseeable future.

The Question of Bases

The United States could strike an agreement with the Kurds to create those bases in northeastern Iraq. Or, the Pentagon could use its bases in countries like Kuwait and Qatar, and its large naval presence in the Persian Gulf, as staging points.

There are arguments for, and against, both options. Leaving troops in Iraq might make it too easy - and too tempting - to get drawn back into the civil war and confirm suspicions that Washington's real goal was to secure permanent bases in Iraq. Mounting attacks from other countries could endanger those nations' governments.

The White House should make this choice after consultation with Congress and the other countries in the region, whose opinions the Bush administration has essentially ignored. The bottom line: the Pentagon needs enough force to stage effective raids and airstrikes against terrorist forces in Iraq, but not enough to resume large-scale combat.

The Civil War

One of Mr. Bush's arguments against withdrawal is that it would lead to civil war. That war is raging, right now, and it may take years to burn out. Iraq may fragment into separate Kurdish, Sunni and Shiite republics, and American troops are not going to stop that from happening.

It is possible, we suppose, that announcing a firm withdrawal date might finally focus Iraq's political leaders and neighboring governments on reality. Ideally, it could spur Iraqi politicians to take the steps toward national reconciliation that they have endlessly discussed but refused to act on.

But it is foolish to count on that, as some Democratic proponents of withdrawal have done. The administration should use whatever leverage it gains from withdrawing to press its allies and Iraq's neighbors to help achieve a negotiated solution.

Iraq's leaders - knowing that they can no longer rely on the Americans to guarantee their survival - might be more open to compromise, perhaps to a Bosnian-style partition, with economic resources fairly shared but with millions of Iraqis forced to relocate. That would be better than the slow-motion ethnic and religious cleansing that has contributed to driving one in seven Iraqis from their homes.

The United States military cannot solve the problem. Congress and the White House must lead an international attempt at a negotiated outcome. To start, Washington must turn to the United Nations, which Mr. Bush spurned and ridiculed as a preface to war.

The Human Crisis

There are already nearly two million Iraqi refugees, mostly in Syria and Jordan, and nearly two million more Iraqis who have been displaced within their country. Without the active cooperation of all six countries bordering Iraq - Turkey, Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria - and the help of other nations, this disaster could get worse. Beyond the suffering, massive flows of refugees - some with ethnic and political resentments - could spread Iraq's conflict far beyond Iraq's borders.

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia must share the burden of hosting refugees. Jordan and Syria, now nearly overwhelmed with refugees, need more international help. That, of course, means money. The nations of Europe and Asia have a stake and should contribute. The United States will have to pay a large share of the costs, but should also lead international efforts, perhaps a donors' conference, to raise money for the refugee crisis.

Washington also has to mend fences with allies. There are new governments in Britain, France and Germany that did not participate in the fight over starting this war and are eager to get beyond it. But that will still require a measure of humility and a commitment to multilateral action that this administration has never shown. And, however angry they were with President Bush for creating this mess, those nations should see that they cannot walk away from the consequences. To put it baldly, terrorism and oil make it impossible to ignore.

The United States has the greatest responsibilities, including the admission of many more refugees for permanent resettlement. The most compelling obligation is to the tens of thousands of Iraqis of courage and good will - translators, embassy employees, reconstruction workers - whose lives will be in danger because they believed the promises and cooperated with the Americans.

The Neighbors

One of the trickiest tasks will be avoiding excessive meddling in Iraq by its neighbors - America's friends as well as its adversaries.

Just as Iran should come under international pressure to allow Shiites in southern Iraq to develop their own independent future, Washington must help persuade Sunni powers like Syria not to intervene on behalf of Sunni Iraqis. Turkey must be kept from sending troops into Kurdish territories.

For this effort to have any remote chance, Mr. Bush must drop his resistance to talking with both Iran and Syria. Britain, France, Russia, China and other nations with influence have a responsibility to help. Civil war in Iraq is a threat to everyone, especially if it spills across Iraq's borders.

President Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney have used demagoguery and fear to quell Americans' demands for an end to this war. They say withdrawing will create bloodshed and chaos and encourage terrorists. Actually, all of that has already happened - the result of this unnecessary invasion and the incompetent management of this war.

This country faces a choice. We can go on allowing Mr. Bush to drag out this war without end or purpose. Or we can insist that American troops are withdrawn as quickly and safely as we can manage - with as much effort as possible to stop the chaos from spreading.

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